

COLLIN COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE



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2006

FORCES

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F O R C E S

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

FORCES literary magazine

ultimately is a result of the year

it reflects; it has no preconceptions.

Parts of this year unfolded with the

continuing war and one of the most

devastating natural disasters in

America's history. Art is not always

the product of beauty, it reflects

that which stirs the horrible and

wonderful at any given moment.

We are reminded that tragedy and

comedy don't alternate but rather

remain two opposing heads of the

same mask, the synthesis of what

it is to be human.



Untitled by Natalie Bazant

Death of One's Former Self

Joel Hall

“God I hate this place.
It isn't the **blazing** heat
or **CRAP** that they call food, but rather
the dehumanization of the **entire** situation.
I am a **tool**. When did I become a tool?”

“Cummings!” yelled the lieutenant. The ramblings in Cory's head quickly ceased as he snapped back to reality.

“Yes sir,” replied Cory as the lieutenant waved him over from his guard point on the roof. Cory waddled over awkwardly, being careful not to become a target by exposing his head above the four-foot wall that surrounded the rooftop.

The lieutenant spoke in hush tones to mitigate the knowledge of their presence from the local population.

“Cummings, you are being temporarily attached to the 5th Special Forces Group. Their medic was wounded last week and we have been asked to provide them with support when they need it. Looks like it's your lucky day.” Cory had a rush of adrenalin. It was a mission that he had dreamed of. A smile came to his face as the words sunk in. The lieutenant continued, “Don't you look too excited now. You're not leaving this party for too long. It's just a re-supply mission to an A-Team down in Samaria. You'll be back before nightfall, and I still expect you to pull your shift tonight when you get back.”

"Yes sir," Cory answered wondering if the supply mission was just a cover for a more sensitive mission such as a raid or recon. He knew several fellow soldiers who had gone out with the Special Forces under a cover mission.

"Now go get some rations and pack up your rucksack just in case. Be ready in fifteen minutes," the lieutenant ordered.

Cory again returned to the refuge of his mind as he made his way down the stairs leading from the roof to his living quarters. *Wahoo! A four-hour vacation.* Cory, a Medic assigned to the 4th Platoon, 4th Military Police Company, was a part of a mission to protect a safe house on the west side of Tikrit. So far it had been a mundane mission like most. The highlight of the mission thus far had been the arrival of his Maxim magazine. Even though it was three months late, he still treasured it. It was the proof he needed to reassure his mind that his existence before being deployed to Iraq had really occurred. Cory made his way to his cot and rustled through the few items under it to determine what he would take with him. He pushed away his poncho and revealed his most precious possession: the three-month old magazine. Cory folded it in half and shoved it into the front pocket of his rucksack, which left Sarah Wynter's eyes staring out at this foreign world around her. The magazine had gotten there only three days earlier and he was anxious to read it. Cory quickly gathered up the remaining items he thought he would need and headed to the front room of the building grabbing his rations on the way.

Cory sat on the broken couch that the platoon inherited with the house. One side of it was propped up by an MRE box, which caused it not to be level. Cory ran through a list in his mind to make sure he had packed everything he needed: 'M-16, ammo, rucksack, rations, med-pack, smokes, night vision, pro-mask, ...' He was interrupted by the sound of three vehicles pulling up to the building. Cory stood up and peered through the dirty glass of the only window in the room. What he saw was not what he expected. Three mid-nineties, white unmarked Land Rovers were pulling up with what seemed to be half of the US Army's arsenal hanging off of the vehicles.

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he had dreamed of.
A smile came to his face
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"That must be my ride," Cory said half laughing to the MP guarding the door. The guard's eyes opened wide and a smile shot across his face.

The guard said enthusiastically, "Looks like you are in for some fun." The guard removed the board that was barricading the door and let Cory out.

Out of the passenger side of the first Land Rover emerged a scruffy looking fellow with a full beard and a deep tan. He was wearing the new Army battle dress uniform, and in typical SF style, had no visible sign of rank or nametags. The only insignia he had was the lone American flag on his sleeve. Cory made his way around the two large barriers blocking the front of the house from the street to meet with him. The man extended his hand and introduced himself as Jim. He had a firm handshake and spoke in a clear strong manor. He told Cory he would be riding in the second vehicle and would be briefed once inside. Cory picked up his gear and moved to the second Land Rover scanning the vehicles and their contents on the way. The trucks appeared to be normal Land Rovers but had been modified with armor plating and machine gun mounts. Whip antennas were mounted to the rear of the vehicles along with fuel and water jugs. The front and rear vehicle had turrets in which fifty caliber machine guns were mounted and manned. Inside the second truck sat two unshaven rough looking men that emitted the proverbial 'I live by my own rules' vibe.

"These guys are bad asses," Cory remarked under his breath as he opened up the rear passenger door and hopped in. He began situating his gear as the Truck Commander in the passenger seat turned and introduced himself as Tommy. He spoke in a southern drawl and had a wad of chew in his mouth, but he had an aura of intelligence and charisma. He gave Cory a brief rundown of the mission and confirmed what Cory's lieutenant has said earlier; it was a simple re-supply mission. Tommy also mentioned that they were going to stop at the Balad Airfield on the way back to "hit up" the Post Exchange, and grab some chow at the new Brown and Root dining hall.

Cory had not been able to go to the Post Exchange in two months and had resorted to smoking Iraqi cigarettes that reportedly contained hash. He thought there was a better chance they had hash in them than tobacco. They were packaged as

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Marlboros, but were far from the class-A tobacco he was use to. The box was printed crudely and off color, and the tobacco was packed so loose he had to be careful not to drop the cherry off the end while smoking. But desperate times call for desperate measures, and he had one of two choices. He could either smoke what he could get or quit, and that wasn't going to happen. Enticing as the PX was, the real food was what he wanted most. The best meal he had in the past three months was a concoction he made by mixing a box of Mac and Cheese with canned tuna seasoned with Tabasco sauce in his canteen cup.

Tommy finished up the brief by explaining the rules of engagement. "The ROE is real simple; if you see me shootin', unload." On that note, Tommy radioed to the lead vehicle that they were ready, and the convoy pulled away from the safe house.

Cory stared out the window of the Land Rover and scanned for enemy activity such as improvised explosive devices, infamously known as IEDs. The summer heat was blistering. Riding in a vehicle seemed to only make it worse. Cory attempted to explain it to his family in a letter home as, "the feeling of opening a three hundred and fifty degree oven that happened to have a sand blaster inside." As they gained speed on the highway, he felt the intensity of the heat amplify. The sand and dust kicked up from the vehicles stung his face and hands. He wore goggles to protect his eyes, but the remaining exposed skin began to blacken as the pollution and dirt stuck to his sweat soaked skin.

He had brought two bottles of water: one cool and one frozen. The heat had taken its toll on both. The cool bottle was now hot and the frozen one was a quarter thawed. He drank the ice-cold water from the frozen bottle and replaced it with water from the hot bottle.

In the process of the delicate water transfer, Tommy spoke up and broke the steady hum of the engine. "So where ya from, Cummings?"

"Murray, Kentucky," Cory shouted, in an effort to be heard over the noise of the wound up engine and wind blowing through the open windows.

"Never heard of it," Tommy responded. He continued jokingly, "Must be one of those small hick towns that are all around there. I was at Campbell a few years back for Air Assault training and had the unfortunate pleasure of getting lost in one of those towns in Kentucky. If not for my training, I wouldn't have made it out alive."

"Yeah, but it's home," Cory replied as he always had in subtle defense. Although the reason he joined the Army was to escape the inevitable life of poverty that was so prevalent in the area, he still felt attached, but he never wished to return there to live.

Cory set the water bottle back down next to his rucksack and caught a glimpse of the eyes of Sarah Wynter staring back at him seductively. A few memories from home entered his mind for a moment, but he pushed them out. He felt this was neither the time nor place to recollect about better times.

Tommy began telling a story about the time he spent in Bosnia. Cory was engrossed in the story and felt as if he had become almost a member of the team. He sensed a comradery among these men that was lacking in his platoon. He felt as if he was an equal and not a tool of a totalitarian ruler.

Suddenly Tommy quit talking mid-sentence and fixated his attention on a vehicle that was stopped on the side of the road a few hundred yards ahead. He motioned for the driver to slow down and strained through the glare to identify if it was friend or foe. The truck was about one hundred feet off the road and had several silhouetted figures around it. The sun was beginning to set, and it was difficult to determine who they were and what they were doing. Reports of IED activity on this main supply route were growing by the day, and an order was given for soldiers to maintain extreme vigilance while conversing this route. The lead vehicle slowed as the convoy approached the parked vehicle, and as Cory processed what he was seeing, the lead vehicle erupted with a splendor of gunfire. The ten plain-clothed men standing beside the old white truck holding AK-47s didn't have a chance. Cory thought the lead vehicle looked like a battle ship from the sixteen hundreds, as he witnessed it engage the targets. The truck

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rocked to one side as the fifty-caliber main gun mounted to the roof of the Land Rover roared to life with fire and smoke. The passenger side of the vehicle breathed fire as tracers streamed out of the side windows as if they were the portholes of the old battle ship.

A fraction of a second later Tommy started to squeeze off rounds from the M-60 machine gun mounted to the side of the Land Rover. Cory knew what he had to do and switched the selector switch on his M-16 from safe to three-round-burst and began unloading on the truck and men around it. The sound was deafening as the two guns fired and pain rung in Cory's ears. The smoke from the rounds was pungent and overwhelming. It burned his eyes and nose and made it difficult to see. The hot brass from Tommy's M-60 flew all around the truck and stung as it occasionally pelted Cory in the face.

Cory's heart was pounding and his whole body began to shake from the adrenaline. This is what he had envisioned when the lieutenant had first told him that he was going out with the Special Forces. This was the moment that Cory had dreamed of, the moment when he would defend his country by taking the lives of its enemies. He was living it, the greatest moment of his life.

Suddenly the lead vehicle screeched to a halt and Jim jumped out of it. Tommy and Cory immediately stopped firing and a rush of confusion was expressed across their faces. The driver of Cory's truck sped to the lead vehicle. As he approached it, a sinking feeling filled Cory's gut. Stenciled in large black letters across the opened driver's door of the destroyed truck said, POLICE, in plain English.

Jim yelled the only word that Cory did not want to hear, "Medic!"

It seemed an eternity between the time it took Cory to make his way from the Land Rover to the Police truck. The dread that he felt made his feet feel like lead and his stomach knotted so bad he vomited as he approached the scene. The moment that was supposed to define his life had become the nightmare he most dreaded. One thought resonated inside of him, "What have I done?"

The essays

Death of One's Former Self

by Joel Self

and Little Afghan Girl

by Stephanie Hall

were written by a

husband and wife.

Joel Self was stationed

in Iraq while Stephanie Hall

was stationed in Afghanistan.

Little Afghan Girl

Stephanie Hall

Private Ryan Miller, or simply Miller to the **military** world, sat down on a **stiff metallic** folding chair, which felt **surprisingly** comfortable. The **young** soldier had been on his **feet** for an **eternity**. At 19 years old, Miller was

the youngest soldier working at a U.S. Army blood clinic in Afghanistan,

but he felt like an 80-year-old man. He dropped his head to look at his watch.

Time to head to the mess hall. At that thought, his stomach let out a loud grumbling noise reminding him he hadn't eaten since that morning. Miller threw on the top half of his tan army fatigues and began buttoning it up. His fingers ached from the rigorous chores of that day. As he was ready to leave, he heard a shuffle of feet and voices out past the door. Then it was silent, almost peaceful, but Miller felt a storm building up. The curiosity to find out what was going on was not strong enough to overpower his desire to eat. With a twinge of guilt, he began planning his escape to the mess hall. Miller was average looking. He was average height with fair skin and blue eyes, and he believed this was why no one ever really noticed him and why it was usually easy for him to escape.

"Private Miller," said Sergeant Richard Garcia. "Get me those reports that have the blood types from everyone who works here." Then the white double-hinged doors swooshed closed behind the big Dominican man.

Man, I didn't even hear him coming, thought Miller as he went to locate the reports. He wondered why the sergeant needed them; military personnel weren't allowed to give blood in the field. He heard the sirens of an ambulance approaching the hospital. Not another one, he thought with disgust. Miller had concluded soon after arriving at Bagram Air Base that the mission there was a lost

Miller was a medic, and he was assigned to the blood clinic, which meant he stayed in a clean, white lab for most of the day. Unlike many of his colleagues, he didn't go out to the smaller outposts, but that didn't mean he was shielded from the ugliness of war.

cause. He'd lost count of all the local Afghan people going through his hospital. There seemed no end to the ailments and injuries the country dealt to its people. What made it worse was that they all seemed so damn ungrateful for the U.S. military's help. Miller often passed by groups of them while they sat in a line around the outside of the tent walls of the field hospital waiting to be seen by an army doctor for minor pains, and he often felt their vacant gazes follow him. They always seemed to be plotting something. *We shouldn't be here. No one wants us here. Not us, and not them.* These thoughts always stayed just beyond his conscious mind waiting for him to dwell on them. He often had to push them back to remind himself he was a part of a "noble cause," as his commanding officer often declared. *Noble cause, my ass.* Miller would think to himself whenever he heard his commander utter those words.

Miller was a medic, and he was assigned to the blood clinic, which meant he stayed in a clean, white lab for most of the day. Unlike many of his colleagues, he didn't go out to the smaller outposts, but that didn't mean he was shielded from the ugliness of war. His hospital had more than its share of wartime casualties, and the worst of them all were the landmine victims. The country had been plagued with the unseen killers for decades, and while military engineers destroyed dozens of landmines a day, more just seemed to grow right back in their places.

"Miller, do you have those reports for me?" asked Garcia urgently, interrupting Miller from his thoughts. Miller handed the tall, stocky sergeant the manila folder with the blood type of the hospital staff.

"Can I go to the chow hall now, sarge?" Miller asked hopefully.

The sergeant just looked at him, shook his head, dug in his pocket and produced a protein bar. He tossed the bar to Miller. "This should tide you over for another hour or so," said Garcia. "You're O-positive right?" Miller nodded and

started to ask why, but Garcia was already leaving. Over his shoulder he called to Miller, "I might need you in a minute. Eat up and help yourself to another one in my desk." The sergeant left Miller still wondering what was going on.

Noises in the distance perked Miller's curiosity, so he stepped past the double doors and walked down the well-lit hallway towards the receiving bay where patients go before they are taken to one of the three operating rooms. All hospital personnel were allowed in the receiving bay because that was where a lot of medical supplies were kept. The thick smell of blood became stronger as he approached that bay. The scene Miller walked in upon knocked him back a step. A girl, no more than 10 years old, lay on a gurney. Her skin was white, and her lips were blue. *She's in shock.* The phrase popped into Miller's mind immediately. The color of her lips was a definite sign of shock. The medic in Miller took over control so as to spare him from nausea as he quickly scanned her injuries. *Another landmine victim,* thought Miller. This one was different somehow. Her frail little body should not have been able to sustain the incredible damage inflicted on her from the landmine. Her body was limp, but God help him if her little hands weren't fisted in determination.

"She's a fighter," whispered Garcia from behind Miller.

Dammit! How does he walk around without making a sound? Miller thought for the hundredth time. Garcia continued. "She needs blood, but we don't have enough of her blood type," he explained. The day before five Afghan men bent on killing one another with AK-47s all needed blood transfusions. They used up the last of the clinic's monthly supply of blood, and it was too risky to wait for a re-supply.

"Typical," said Miller. "This innocent girl is going to die because of those dumbasses." Garcia couldn't do anything else but smile.

"We have to amputate it," said the doctor with his back to Miller. This brought Miller's attention back to the girl. The doctor began loosening what looked

Thoughts of his
own little sister
snuck into his
thoughts uninvited.
Stop it,
he ordered himself
before the image
of his sister
lying on that table
could form.

like a wire from around the girl's upper right thigh. "They wrapped it too high," he continued. "This leg could have been saved, but it's too late for that now."

"Her right leg was swollen and had a sick purple-black hue to it. The color reminded him of how, when he as a kid, he would wrap a string around his fingers to watch it turn purple and feel it turn cold. She must be cold. Thoughts of his own little sister snuck into his thoughts uninvited. Stop it, he ordered himself before the image of his sister lying on that table could form. He continued examining the girl from a distance. Her left leg was completely gone. In its place was charred black skin that looked like a piece of rag torn down the middle. The remaining shards had blood slowly oozing out onto the white gurney.

A nurse, winded from rushing to the bay, called out to the doctors. "The second OR is ready." The doctors wheeled the girl out of the receiving bay past another set of double doors into the operating room where Miller could not follow. He felt completely pissed off for a second because he wouldn't find out until later if the girl made it. *She's not going to make it*, Miller told himself.

"We need one more volunteer," said Garcia after the doctors were out of sight.

"Volunteer?" asked Miller. *He wants me to donate my blood*. His initial reaction was to say "no." After all, that little girl had no chance. *Even if she does live, she's fated to become a burden on her family*. Then he thought of her little fists. *She wants to live*. "Sure thing Sarge," said Miller weakly. "Sign me up."

An hour later, Garcia was wrapping gauze around Miller's arm to keep the needle puncture from bleeding. "Are you all right, soldier?" asked Garcia.

"Yeah, sarge," replied Miller. It was a lie. Miller felt lightheaded as he stood up. His vision blurred, and he lost his balance.

"Damnit, soldier," Garcia said as he pulled the uneaten protein bar from Miller's pocket. He shook his head and said, "Let's get going. Dinner's on me. Just don't faint, okay?" Miller simply nodded.

"Why did we just do that, Sarge?" Miller asked once they were finished eating their food at the mess hall. Garcia looked up at Miller, so he continued. "We all know that if that girl lives, she is going right back out there where she could end up in a similar or worse situation. There is no point to this all. Why are we here when we aren't making any headway with the people here?" Miller's voice became more anguished as he spoke.

"What do you mean?" asked Garcia.

"Take those five men who we treated the other day," said Miller. "They're not going to change their ways. Once they're well enough to pull a trigger, they're just going to go right back to killing each other." Miller's voice quivered with anger. "They don't want us here. I hate it here!" Miller's fists struck the table and sent his fork flying to the floor.

"You got it all wrong Miller," said Garcia with more than a little impatience. "We aren't here for those SOBs. They don't appreciate life because they don't even value their own. It's true," he continued. "We're making huge sacrifices being here, but I'll tell you what. If we can change the minds of the younger generation here, the generation that hasn't been corrupted by all of that Islamic fanatic bullshit, then these people, people just like that little girl, will have a future worth appreciating and preserving."

Miller let Garcia's words sink in, and his initial anger abated somewhat. After they left the mess hall, Garcia and Miller headed back to the hospital. They walked together in silence, but Garcia's words were whizzing through Miller's head. His words began grinding through Miller's guts. *What a jerk for making me feel this way*, Miller thought with an inward cringe.

When they arrived back at the hospital, they found the hospital abuzz about the little Afghan girl. "It's a miracle," Miller heard over and over. *She made it?*

"She's in intensive care, but she's still alive," Miller overheard a doctor

They walked together
in silence, but
Garcia's words were
whizzing through
Miller's head. His
words were grinding
through Miller's guts.

The interpreter
and the young girl
looked up at Miller
at the same time.
Her eyes pierced
right through
his shield of anger
and frustration.
He wondered what
she had said.

telling Garcia. "She's on some powerful painkillers, so she hasn't woken up yet. She's alive, but there's a pretty good chance she's going to have severe brain damage. She lost a lot of blood."

It couldn't just be all good news. Miller thought with disappointment.

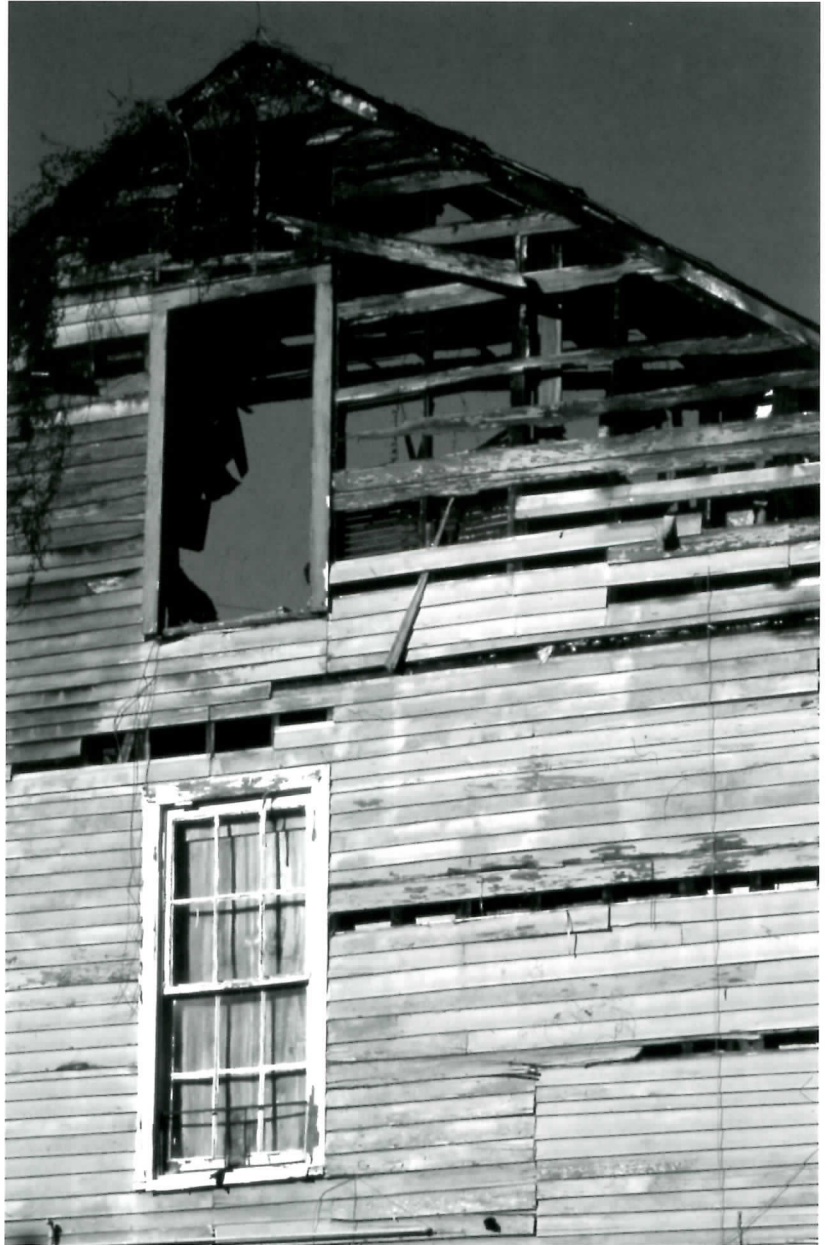
During the following days, Miller made it a habit of leaving a cup of ice cream he had stolen from the mess hall at the little girl's bedside while she slept. One afternoon, a couple of weeks later, the girl was awake when Miller visited. She seemed to recognize him. Even while liquid painkillers dripped through her I.V. needle into her blood stream, her eyes seemed alive and vibrant. Miller asked her nervously how she was doing as if she understood. Her interpreter began relaying what Miller said, but Miller's words were broken and jumbled. The young girl sensed his uneasiness, so she uttered a simple word. Miller knew from the handful of Dari he had to learn while in that country that she said, "Stop." She looked up at her interpreter, and she said a few words. The interpreter and the young girl looked up at Miller at the same time. Her eyes pierced right through his shield of anger and frustration. He wondered what she had said. The Afghans sitting around the tent walls often uttered similar phrases. *Did she say that we should leave? Did she say that we are not welcomed?*

"She said, 'Thank you.'" The interpreter continued in a shushed voice. "She said, thank you for her life," conveyed the interpreter. "And she said to thank you for the ice cream as well."

Gettysburg

Molly Boyce

the war dragged on for days
between shots and shells
and whistling cannon balls,
blue and gray men scattered
in fields where clover
struggled to bloom,
the dung of death
rose high in the air,
even horses shied at
the smell as red streams
crossed in wagon tracks
and men marched onward
into Hell.



Blue House by Nick Young

Chimney

Ming Bai

You stand there everyday
Quietly and still
You will never go away
For ages and ages
Staring at something
Smoking a pipe continuously
Contemplating like a sage
On an old prolonged fray
Civilization and its prey

The Streets of Pompeii

Rebecca Horchak



Church

Julie Jewett

"I can really feel the presence of the Lord today, Hey-man."

The preacher speaks like composing a symphony, with
accents and crescendos at the important moments.

He works "Amen" 'till it sounds like "Hey-man," maybe it sounds more
important that way since he doesn't know Latin.

"...Dinosaurs existed. Neanderthal man existed, but
God *breathed life* into Adam. The church has to be
able to answer these kinds of questions..."

"...Tongues is just the *evidence* of the presence..."

I want to run the tips of my fingers across your lips,
let them trail down the side of your neck, your chest,
take your hand and tell you to
feel my heart as it beats faster.

I look around and everyone is
arms, eyes closed crying looking up at God.

And I wonder if they can really see him.

Rosa Parks

R. Scott Yarbrough

You tell me my ebony skin is like kilned ivory
Shiny and honed smooth by Jim Crow who keeps me
In my place. And you tell me that my music is too
Sad for your white soul, yet you digest it like a meal
And ship it to England and disguise it in Rolling Stones
Or gyrate it into the hips of a snarling Memphis boy. You tell
Me my place is at the back of the bus where I can sit with
My own kind, even though you often leave me standing in
The cold Alabama winter after I pay, telling me you're "full-up."

I bet that bus driver thought he was just going
to have another drive under the mesmerizing
drone of his everydayness, his rearview seeing only white.

Well today I'm full-up. Today I am tired of eating Crow
and providing your music and tending your children
and stitching together the fabric of your souring souls. I think
I'll rest these two hundred years of oppression right up
Front so everyone can see my ebony skin is like kilned
Ivory: heavy and hard but willing to mold a path through
The wilderness for my children to freely follow.

Sweet Sadness

Lena Sarr

Happy they were when I received the I-20.
Happy they were when I got my visa.
Happy they were that I was going to college.
I was so excited to go discover a new world.
I was so happy about the thought to see my brothers.
But, the day packing started.
The day I realized that I would have to be by myself:
When I will wake up, back from school, before going to bed,
Nobody will be by my side.
No more cook, no driver, no maid in the house to help me out.
Joy quickly changed to fear and I had a fever that night.
Should I go or stay?
Mother, do not try to hide from me; I know that you cry.
Father, do not turn your head from me; I know that you suffer.
Happy and sad were we at the same time.
The day expected arrived too soon.
I was leaving my country, shared by different emotions.
By this cold and unforgettable night I was leaving
my house, my cozy little nest, my parents.
Mum, your little rose is uprooted and moved to a new vase.
Dad, from now on your bird will have to find her milk by herself.
Your little, delicate bird has left to a new sky.
She will open her wings and fly in the wind of life.

Yellow House by Nick Young





Circe

Karen Carlin

On your island all alone,
With only Nymphs and tame beasts,
On behalf of company
Circe, of dire beauty and divinity,
Immortal daughter of grand Helios.

Sings your sweet song,
To lure masculine company.
Indulging them like mighty Kings,
With feasts of cheese, and barley,
Toasts of Parmnian wine,
Seasoned with potion,
Of divine conception.
You tire of lonely sailors hastily,
And change their form from man to swine.
Your preference to the company of beasts.

Circe, of dire beauty and divinity,
Immortal daughter of grand Helios.
It is your trickery that is the cause,
On your island all alone,
With only Nymphs and tame beasts,
On behalf of company.

In Awe of the Coliseum

Rebecca Horchak

Homer's Epic Truth

Barbara Sequenzia

Who is this man who writes of wonder, fear, gripping death,
Who pens the demons' cruel daggers, toasted body parts on a platter.
Blood drenched quivers to end a score.
His thoughts are visions, explicit imagery;
An artist's canvas immersed in epic myths.

Who is this man who spins the web of manipulating monarchs,
Puppetry on a string with cocked bows, destiny in their hands.
Deity amiss lashing at revenge, jovial, gleeful, overjoyed,
Never knowing where to end.

Who is this conniving mind that burns the threshold of the loins,
Gripping life with emotion, lust, sweat, sex-driven bodies
In slow motion like a dream never to be awoken.
Loathing, caressing, repulsive, emanate passion, lost fidelity.

Are you really the great unknown?
Dipping the soul in a world of ancient expositions;
Yet buried deep within lies a venom you grasp,
Spellbound, lynching every women.

Spirits driven from time to time
Of the golden calf that
Awaits its moment of epic truth.

Diferencias

Sandra Aravena

Igual a las pinturas de Salvador Dalí
Hay ángulos invisibles
Que nos diferencian como personas

Entre las flores
Hay colores que se desvanecen
Necesitando gotas de lluvia
Para poder crecer

Rodeados por arbustos anchos, pequeños y extranjeros
La gente;
Viendo sin mirar al pasto más alto,
En medio de vidas egoístas
Hechas de concreto por la mano del hombre
Se pierden la foto perfecta, del triángulo

Mientras un coro de pájaros llora, por última vez
Para llamar la atención de los más desvalidos,
Ramas delgadas con
Diamantes espléndidos,
Se cuelgan con fuerza
Mitad mojados, mitad secos de la vida.

Differences

Sandra Aravena

The same as Salvador Dali paints
Are those invisible angles
That differentiates some of us

Within flowers
Colors are fading away
In need of rain drops
For life to grow

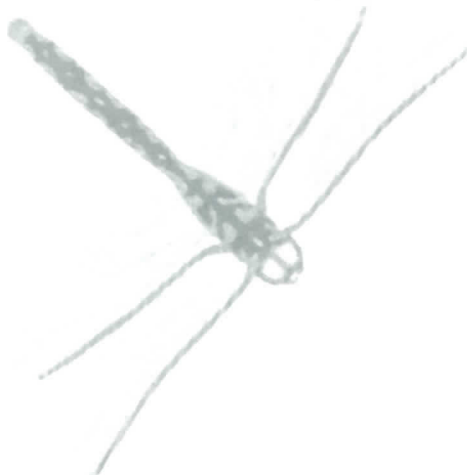
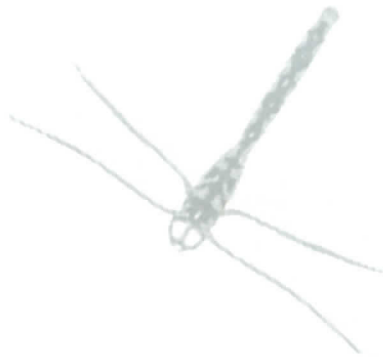
Surrounded by small wide foreign bushes
People;
Seeing without looking at the tall grass,
In the middle of an egotistic
Manmade concrete life
Missed the perfect triangle

While a choir of birds crying, for the last time
To all those helpless ones,
Thin branches with
Splendid diamonds,
Hang strong
Half wet, half dry from life.

Dream of Dragonflies

Kristi Farr

The wind blows by
Somewhere but here
Fields of grass
Sway in the breeze
A small little fence
Runs along the hill
A pond to my side
Glistens in the sun
Surplus of clouds
Patch the sky
A tiny life
Flies on by
He dances on air
Not a care on his mind
Soon one more
A dancer like him
With the rhythm
Joins along
I watch their graceful bodies
Float across the sky
What a beautiful scene
A dream of dragonflies



Companion

Devon Boyd

She holds me	the platelet's when i bleed
she hugs me	she's the cure to my pain
she kissed	and the same remedy
and she touched me	that has uplifted my soul
i love thee	with the hand you can see
her body's	gave me the power, the strength
constructed so beautifully	and this energy
soft spoken and lovely	to break through the shackles
when rowdy not ugly	and set myself free
who is she	she keeps me fulfilled
on the days that I've cried	and never leaving me empty
she was there by my side	she was right there in my system
speaking nothing but true	when the drama came to get me
never spilling a lie	standing face to face
in the presence of her	when New Orleans came to tragedy
i feel better inside	kept a smile on my face
stay on top and i lust	while Katrina caused casualties
to get in her's a must	bringing hope to my heart
back and forth this thing moves	when i thought that corpses were
and as one we both groove	family
and we loose ourselves in	no she's not a goddess
the presence of the other	but has the power of divinity
she provides me with rhythm	so who is she
and no blues from my lover	she is poetry
she's the air that i breathe	

Soothing each others heart

Whisper

D. Drane

My love

Let us whisper

From nightfall to sunrise

Soothing each other's heart

Whispering sweet words

Sweet like honey

That land softly into the ear

Soft like a pillow of flowers

Choice words

For only you and I

Ending with a kiss

So let us whisper

My love

Whisper

D. Drane

Whispering sweet words

A Virgin

Beth Turner Ayers

...A Virgin
ready, willing, waiting, anticipating the moment she shares her gift, in love, convinced that the time is right to transition from being
who he patiently adores, ready, willing, waiting for that moment when he, once again, will conquer

Sweet like honey

Three Little Words

Ronald Eubanks

Three little words
Now what might they be?
Our language
Has so many mixings of three.

There's the Father, Son
And Holy Ghost
Mashed potatoes and gravy
To go with the roast.

Three points for a field goal
Three strikes and you're out.
The old British cheer
Said three times with a shout.

How are you? I'm fine.
Is this really true?
Each statement's three words
The contraction's the clue.

Some threes come in sorrow
Such as it's "sad, but true"
And some with excitement
You know, "I love you."

I know of three others
I don't want to repeat
They come from my past
Fraught with meaning replete

They came from my wife
In our thirty fifth year
The sound in my heart
Will forever be clear

She turned to me softly
And smiled through the tears
(We had been one
For thirty five years)

We've shared every moment
The good times and bad
It's mostly been happy
But sometimes it's sad

That day was a sad one,
I still feel indignant.
For these three little words were,
"It is malignant."

So started the journey
That's lasted six years
In that time there has been
Much more laughter than tears

In December a PET scan
Gave our hearts ease
The report of the doctor,
"No sign of disease."

We've now begun
Our forty first year
We never look back
Have nothing to fear

"It is malignant"
But, we won't let it win
Each day is a new day
So we just begin.

Three words in a question
Three words in reply
Which are the truth?
And which are a lie.

You may ask us the question,
What we say's not some line.
We really do mean it.
"How are you?" "We are fine."



Untitled by Sean Ng

Words

Lukusa Williams

Words that can't be so easily erased
It will take time to heal, you say
Don't shout, speak soft
I know that you mean
The river of words,
Flows like a stream

You can't forget; it's said; it's done
No matter how hard
So it seems, you've won
So listen first, and speak last
Your words,
Tiny sharp pieces of glass.

woman, entombed

Sydney Portilla-Diggs

I used to grab at life with both hands
cramming fists full of love
into my open mouth
but now it is more than my stomach
can stand
bitterness takes longer to digest
your passion does not nourish me
I've taken so much of you inside
until I've grown numb
with your endless platitudes
your cynical attitudes
difficult pills to swallow
like horse pills
too many pills
too many pills lined up in a row on the table
beside the bed
the doctors call it neuropathy
I call it self-defensive apathy
for I am becoming a mannequin
plastic from the inside out
soon I will become
just another shiny shell
but you can't hurt
you can't hurt me
not me
not me
not
anymore

venom

because of you, a verdant vine
entwines my heart so tightly
that forgiveness has no release
and hatred remains imprisoned
I am not like some gnarled
brown leaf trembling on a barren
wintry limb in metaphoric death
this grudge is living and growing
fed by your failure to take
responsibility for your actions
because of you, I lost so much
because of you, I cannot
forgive myself
because of you, the poison
spreads through every part
of my life
and I can find no peace

La Sobrina (The Niece)

Diana Santos Browning

Tio Juan was a tall man, the eldest of my father's five siblings. My memories of him are clear and crisp. He always wore a fedora hat and smoked cigars. To this day the aroma of cigars

evokes his laughter in my heart. For you see, *Tio Juan* was my favorite uncle. Every time I saw him he would hug me tight. With a *cerveza* in one hand and a cigar in the other, he'd bounce me on his knee as he, my father and my grandfather solved the problems of the day underneath the Texas stars.

During his life time, *Tio* worked hard at a variety of jobs. The one I recall the most, however, was when he worked cutting meat at the meat market. The meat cutters had large, sharp blades on them, which caused him on two separate occasions, to lose parts of two fingers. I didn't care what his hands looked like. I was a little girl who adored the man who would dance with me at family weddings. He would twirl me around the floor to the sound of the *cumbias* and *polkas*, my homemade dresses with petticoats swishing as we danced.

Time moved onward. *Tio* had his share of problems in life. He favored drinking just a little too much. After several years of trying to make their marriage work, even though she still loved him, my aunt left. He tried to get on with his life. *Tio* moved around a lot and communication with him was erratic; but every phone call or letter brought elation. In the meantime, I was growing up, making plans. Those plans included marriage. As *Tio* floated in and out of my life, I don't think he realized how fast I had grown.

One day, shortly after I'd announced my engagement, he dropped by the house to visit. My father was home and he and I greeted *Tio Juan* with warmth and enthusiasm. My father was younger than *Tio*, but only by four years. Dad was older

than the fathers of most people my age. He'd served in World War II. He married later in life and I was born when he was 40 years old. My father had done a lot of living before I was born. I think because of his experiences during the war, he was more open minded than Tio. In a fox hole one must learn to depend on the soldier beside you, regardless of race or religious affiliation, because that soldier may be the one who saves your life.

The young man I'd chosen to marry was not Mexican-American. He was white. Anglo—a *gringo*. But I didn't see the color of his skin. This disturbed Tio very much. He immediately made it clear that he had come to visit for one reason only. Tio told me, in front of my father, that if I married this young man who was not Mexican-American, I would no longer be his niece. My heart could not believe what I just heard! I was deeply wounded. One thing I'd learned from my father though was to always stand up for myself. Without skipping a beat I told Tio that, with all due respect, if my own father was not prohibiting me from marrying this young man, I'd be darned if he was going to. With that Tio turned and walked out of my life forever.

Tio Juan died four years later when the apartment he was living in caught on fire while he was sleeping. I never heard his laughter again; I didn't get to say goodbye. It has taken many years for the wound in my heart to scar. It has taken just as many years to realize that Tio's attitude towards my marriage to a *gringo* was not because Tio was hateful. Because of the era in which he grew up, I'm certain he experienced many injustices as a result of his ethnicity; he didn't want me to experience similar negativity. I don't have very many tangible reminders of him. The mementos I did have I threw away after I got married. I did not then see a reason to keep them. All that remain are a few faded photos of a younger, happier Tio, the way I remember him. I could choose to be resentful of Tio's decision to disown me, but instead I've chosen to keep only the tender memories of Tio etched in my heart. He will always be my favorite uncle.

I never heard
his laughter again;
I didn't get to say
goodbye.
It has taken many years
for the wound
in my heart to scar.



Untitled by Cory Graham



Almost **Dejà Vu**

Beth Turner Ayers

It was almost déjà vu

Two separate times

Fifteen years apart

The physician made the call

My response was the same

The chair legs scraped

Across the kitchen floor

Then I sat down and said

"Are you sure?"

Vocal disbelief was clear

Equally clear was his certainty

But that's not possible

I thought, then thought again

Not probable, but true

The first time

Brought surprise and joy

It was more than the flu

That caused my symptoms

New life was revealed

The second time

Brought equal surprise

Carcinoma revealed

New appreciation for life

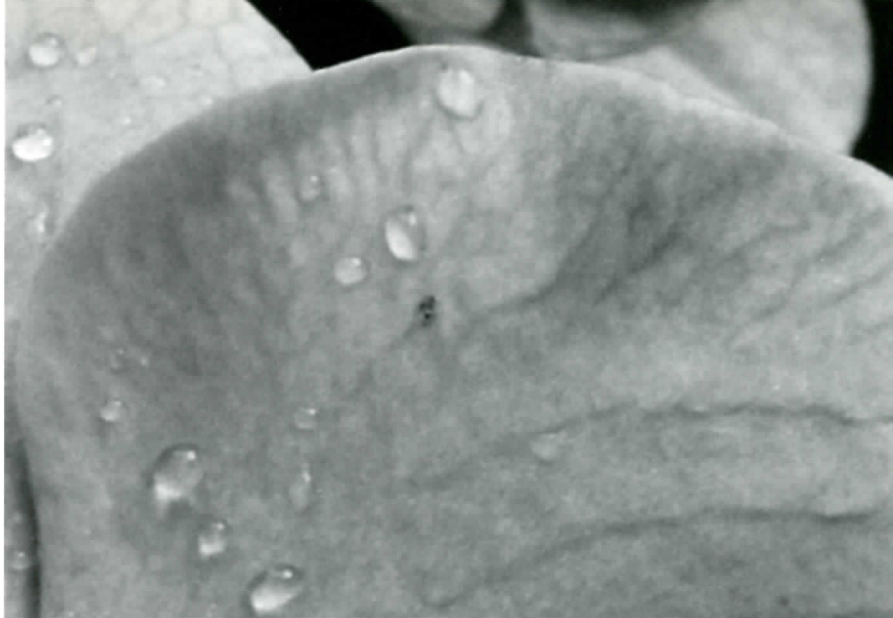
Rope by Paul Bellah

Slight of Hand

Beth Turner Ayers

Viewed from behind
Hands lay lightly on her lap
Demurely clasped
The look of a lady
His hand reached hers
Embracing the two
With a gentle caress
Acceptance noted
By the slightest touch
A fingertip embrace
A smile is perceived
From unseen face and face
A slight upturning of lips
Inferred
By quiet facial movement
A rapid glimpse exchanged
Almost imperceptible
A light tightening touch
Shares his response
Youthful play of hands and heart
From hands that have played
For decades

Offering by Paul Bellah



on the roof

Molly Boyce

the Pendleton mare,
that old nag from Audubon Park petting zoo,
floated along St. Charles Avenue
tangled on a barge of limber bits,
the watershed from our neighbor's backyard,
and the sign from Cutter's Corner
angled at her rump

we bided time three days
on the edge of abyss
our apartment drowned
two floors below
and the Cranes, they
disappeared altogether

State copters above
buzzed twice-a-day
waving at us and Juniper,
the hold-outs of evacuees
streaming through waist-high water
what they yell, I'll never repeat,
for sure, God's ears closed days ago

radio broadcasts fear, disturbance, then silence
as downtown hosts a Mardis Gras
of hatred and greed,
the world flipped upside down
in a matter of hours,
jambalaya drying in the hot sun

sunrise gives us over
to heat and mosquitoes
as we boil Ponchatrain water
and spend more fuel
never planning for this many days
of hunger, thirst, and grilling
on the roof

Panic

Molly Boyce

I close my eyes tight,
hush all my screams,
but they crowd back
into this ball of twine,
twisted and swirled,
like time out of rhyme,
and when my head
begins to throb and ache
I know it is time to
turn the world loose
and let it go spinning.

the day after

Molly Boyce

cows stranded
on high ground,
that memory
pervasive and clear,
divines my soul

blue flash of light,
another transformer gone,
then endless black night
as the beginning of man
living from sun to sun

through the days
of fecal matter,
mass humanity,
fear, hopelessness,
curfews, and silence

cries go unheeded,
answered one by one
in the slow exact
eradication of humans
by natural cause

Funeral Pyre

Molly Boyce

my mouth is dry from
useless talk and grinding
teeth grate my tongue
Julia cried her crocodile
tears for all to see
as Daddy passed in his box
of walnut-stained pine
draped with gladiolas, rose and iris,
flowers he never liked

the limo, ancient,
sputtering oil fumes
and grime down the lane
between Garner and Portia,
who knew their names?
silent moments forgotten,
dusk in an open field
tragic endings
etched in stone

the crowd was sparse
standing cold in the black rain
shadows of sorrow lingered
around our feet,
blackbirds pattered
on wood and steel,
men in black with carnations,
mingled tears
mist-covered grave

the petal compost lingers,
sod risen mound of gloom
and there he is-
his presence in the dark
filling my heart,
flooding my mind,
a velvety butterfly over
cotton bloomed fields
alights atop the stone

Pietá

Julie Jewett

My upward bent legs beneath the blankets,
in the gray light of the
just before daybreak,
make me think of The Madonna's great legs: like
half a giant hiding under a swell of marble fabric.

Her knees surge upward like
two of Tethys' ancient fingers,
and the surface of the ocean rises with them without breaking
to join the smoothly downward flowing stream
that is her son's dead body.

But she was no Titan;
she was a real person.
Could her legs really have held up
all the troubles of the world lying there
like a toppled Roman column across her lap?

What Your Lover Is Really Saying

Julie Jewett

I need you like oxygen.
I want to suck you into my lungs.
push you through my roller coaster bloodstream
until my entire body is fed,
then spit your wasted cells out for the trees to fix.

Diana **In the Autumn Wind**

Julie Jewett

She fell in love with a mortal man
who could not understand why so many
girls loved him.

He let her know that even she was really not
so special, but one among many.

So now she laughs and sets loose the hounds on
any unlucky
who happens to stray too close.

And will end her life as a mound of
dried leaves, blown away by the wind.

I want to say that you belong to me
until you begin to resent everything;
When I tell you, "No, you can't go out with your friends,"
the always automatic grip on your arm and
the way I look at the moon like I own it.

My Mother is a God-Fearing Woman

Julie Jewett

Women who wear pants are going to hell.

I know that because my Sunday school
teacher told me so.

Heaven is like an amusement park;
kids under twelve get in free.

For everyone else, you have to be good all the time,
or else be careful not to get hit by a car
just after you've done something bad.

Cleanliness is next to godliness,
so be sure to keep your house in a perfect state
of cleanness, or all the church ladies
will cluck their tongues at you.

They might even call a meeting to pray for
"Poor Kelly, who is backsliding again."

Wash your hands until they bleed.

Stigmata.

Penance.

Lock yourself up in your house; a fortress
to keep out all the evil clawing at your door.

Shut yourself in your room.

Meditate on the Word of the Lord.

Meditate on the

Meditate

Meditate

Keep the evil thoughts at bay.

If you say them out loud,

it means you are evil at heart.

Don't blaspheme the Holy Ghost.

God doesn't love you.

You are unlovable.

God won't forgive you.

You are unforgivable.

Going to burninhell.

Feel the adrenaline coursing
through your body.

It's the Fear of God.

The Pebble

Ronald Eubanks

The only clue

A pebble on a pristine landscape

No scar

No discolor

No abrasion

A landscape carefully maintained

Zero risk for pebbles

No erosion

No pollution

No blight

A landscape admired

Productive

No neglect

No abuse

No regrets

And yet, a pebble

But just a pebble

No boulder

No rock

No stone

A pebble invisible

Not seen or felt

No alarm

No warning

No signal

But the pebble must go

Or others will come

No guessing

No waiting

No crying

The pebble dug up

The landscape cleansed

No pebble?

No knowing "if?"

No knowing "why?"

The landscape?

Changed. But the gardener

No fear

No anger

No despair

The landscape is serene

Its beauty safe for now

Content? Yes.

Joyous? Yes.

Loved and loving? Yes.

Amy Howerton

"I am the innocence in a child's
eyes...I judge not, yet I welcome all
the majesties of every race...I am born
of prodigal hearts of every sort...Defining
my purpose to all mankind in my every gesture,
Inheriting the souls of my predecessors and
living eternally to share with all, such glory
Binding generations of eccentricity...
My gift to you... a legacy... of their
Definitions and convictions..."

I'm Today's Cinderella

Talmeez F. Burney



I'm the new age's,
today's
Cinderella.
Now my real mother rather than stepmother
takes me to parties,
where the arrival of a prince is expected.
Now a fairy doesn't help me to get ready.
Now I do it all by myself.
I've been trained for that.
I've turned grooming into a business.
Now nobody asks me a wear a specific color.
Now everyone's wish comes true even before it is said.

I'm today's Cinderella.
Now parties don't end at eleven or twelve.
Rather, they start at that time and continue all night long.
I'm today's Cinderella.
At every single party where I go,
there is more than one prince,
and countless Cinderellas.
Along with their mothers and fathers,
who bring their daughters for every bargain,
for every unfulfilled goal.
They bring them well-prepared.

I'm today's Cinderella.
I go to parties,
I even offer to dance with a prince before he asks me.

Now nobody's stare,
touch,
words,
closeness,
heated breath,
lips,
disturb me at all from the inside.
Because I know,
and he knows too,
that this encounter is neither the first nor the last.

I'm today's Cinderella.
I've countless pairs of shoes,
a thousand dresses,
but every time, I have a problem before going to the party,
like the story's Cinderella.
Even though I have many dresses and shoes,
not a single shoe is left at the party by mistake.

I'm today's Cinderella.
I'm waiting
for the right moment
when the prince and his men,
will wander house to house
with my missing shoe.
I'm today's Cinderella.
If his men come, then my mom wouldn't hide me.
I'm today's Cinderella.



I know

even if the shoe is too loose or tight for my foot,

I would say, "Yes it is my shoe."

After that I wouldn't ever wear my own size shoe.

My shoes will be big or small.

But I will wear them for the rest of my life,

like a quick fix.

I'm today's Cinderella.

After the wedding my husband will take me to parties.

He will present me well groomed

like my mother.

His eyes will push me

toward

every big shot,

bureaucrat,

CEO,

because

I'm today's Cinderella,

but maybe he doesn't know

that I use my body and mind at the same time.

I'm today's Cinderella.

Mixed Media Collage by Lori Carr



Spoiled

Misty Boldish

Spoiled like milk. She's now sour
Daddy bought her a new car
She's totaled it within the hour
Daddy buys her some new rings
They tarnish, lost of all power
Daddy buys her a flower
At night, locks her in a one window tower
Daddy's little girl

Hollow husk, filled with dust
I ride into the sunset
Where suburban qualities of the superficial shine
Material characteristics of shallow minds
But it's ok cuz daddy's gonna take care of it
Financial backbone that keeps her fit
Liopsuction addictions, a bitch to quit
She'll throw a fit if her clothes aren't chic
Looking to marry a "get rich quick"

Pop music flows out bubble gum ears
Smiles swollen, Botox injected, minds all infected
Brainwashed by society
From Barbie to catalog models
Influenced by unattainable standards
No longer in need of good genes
When mommy bought you high cheekbones
On the clearance rack
Girls who want to grow up to be weightless
But never strive as high as Astronauts
So she purges her material problems
Down the drain
Never forced to just deal with pain
Thinkin' if she's skinny
She'll gain respect, fame

Blaming mommy and daddy
for not buying her some self-worth
Could have started investing since birth

Wanting their daughters
to have things they never got
Candy ideas that made their kids' brains rot
And all they fought for was lost
To silicone dreams and anti-wrinkle creams
Putting a mask on in the morning

Spoiled like milk, she's now sour
Daddy bought her a new car
She's totaled it within the hour
Daddy buys her some new rings
They tarnish, lost of all power
Daddy buys her a flower
At night, locks her in a one window tower
Daddy's little girl

Didn't flinch
When
She divorced her innocence
Adopted ignorance
Bastard child
Forced to suckle his mother's failures

Her circle of friends
Consist of
Plath and Sexton
Daring each other to die first

None could stand, life
Each with die in hand, rolled
6 6 6
Died with a material girl's twist

Puckered with life's final kiss
Daddy's girl, in the end
Used her last wish
And before the mirror, transformed
Into a terrible fish!



Pleasure Collage by Angela Minnich

The signature

Shawn Stewart

I sign my life upon a line,
On dots of ink-recorded time,
So that a weeping world may see
The bloodless path it draws of me.

Seasons

Ralph Long

Grey bare trees shiver
Wrapped in thin icy blankets
Awaiting new warmth

Green buds peek from twigs
Anticipating their days
Dressing in vibrant hues

Branches stretch skyward
Relish midday's oppression
Provide cool respite

Shedding crisp locks of
Red yellow brown purple gold
Sleepy limbs succumb

An Angel of Autumn

Jade Lynnette Foster

As fall came around this year,
I feared, most of all,
It would get cold all too quickly
Frost would cover me,
Jackets and scarves would be scarce.
Then, there you were,
An angel of autumn
Covering my fears with blankets of hope,
And drying my swollen eyes
With your wings of grace.
You float through my dreams
And carefully play the music in my heart.
Most of all, you hold my hand
And wait for me to open my eyes.
Oh, dear Angel are there enough
Words in earth to describe you,
Enough songs in heaven to sing to you,
Enough love in this body to surround you?



Pears by Susan Brookshire



St. Vincents by Nick Young

Experiencing Hurricane Katrina

B. J. Fischer, Ph.D.

Latrice Fefie was already seated in the **mobile** classroom where I taught Introductory Sociology at Richland College in **Dallas**. On the **first** day I liked arriving **early** to the classroom so that I could chat with **students**, find out more about

them, their dreams, and their reasons for taking the course. The 18-year-old was supposed to be attending Dillard College, an all black, faith-based, liberal arts college in New Orleans. Having just purchased \$475.00 worth of books along with a new wardrobe, Latrice had declared herself a pre-engineering major with an acute interest in robotics.

But Hurricane Katrina changed all that.

For the past two months Latrice has been sharing a small apartment, just outside of Dallas, with her father and two brothers after having been shuffled between sports arenas, hotels and guest rooms. Her new life has been narrowed between attending class in a new city and taking care of her hurricane-dazed father who has decided to stay in Dallas and start a new life. When asked how she felt about being in a new place, she exclaimed, "It was really strange, almost like being out of my body. And I don't wake up to my little cousin singing and playing, anymore!"

Latrice lived just east of the Ninth Ward on Almonastar. It had been hit hard when the levee gave way and flooded her house up to the second floor. Luckily, she got out. Along with her father, two brothers, an aunt and uncle, she arrived at the Superdome Sunday afternoon. She stood in a long line for what seemed like forever. Everyone was hand checked by the Army National Guard. Backpacks, suitcases

Her new life has been narrowed between attending class in a new city and taking care of her hurricane-dazed father who has decided to stay in Dallas and start a new life.

and grocery bags were opened and searched for any sharp objects, forks, knives, even can openers. Her eyebrow shaper was even confiscated. By the time she finally got inside, it was 7:00 p.m. She was safe.

Or so she thought.

Some things remained vivid in her mind. "I remember, first," she recounted in awe, "seeing all of these people, so many people. Just look at all of these people." She noted how the National Guard trucks never stopped bringing people to the Superdome. She remembered thinking that she had to get to the front of the line; otherwise, she would never get on the bus. I tried to imagine what it must have been like to be standing in line amidst so many tired, frizzled, and cranky people.

But as the hours dragged on, Latrice wondered if she would ever get out of that wretched place. At times, a large commotion signaled that buses might be arriving. But that proved to be mostly due to an extraordinary sense of anticipation people felt about getting rescued from a bad dream. The noise, body odors, crying babies, soldiers shouldering M-16's, and dim light began to wear away at her sense of normalcy.

The evacuation plan for this underserved population consisted of reserving a large shelter, the New Orleans Superdome, which could contain up to 50,000 people, as a temporary solution to ride out a hurricane. This facility was never intended to house people beyond several hours. Most certainly it was never constructed to contain people for days in hot, stifling weather. It could withstand hurricane force winds. It was considered by engineers one of the strongest structures in the city. But the breach of the 17th Street canal in Jefferson Parish allowed the waters of Lake Pontchartrain to come rushing in and flood most of the housing for this poor population. It turned the Superdome into what one witness called a "descent into pure hell."

Latrice remembered being startled awake by men yelling in loud voices: "She fell down, we need some help!" A woman had fallen to the floor and some men were seeking assistance. "I guess that they tried to take the woman to the medical center towards the rear of the Superdome," she recollected, "but they came back carrying her saying that the medical center was closed. It had closed at 9:00PM. "How can you close something like that at a time like this," asked Latrice, her voice quivering with anger. "So they had to carry the woman back to the line and they didn't even help her... she died right there and they didn't even lift a finger to carry her off to another place... they wanted her to lie right there...the soldiers."

Frustrations were rising because the toilets were filthy and overflowing, the air conditioning had broken down, and the generator-powered lights were low. People were worried about their children's safety. Rumors were flying about possible rapes or attacks.

But, "There was one woman," Latrice said, "who was just the most inspirational to me because she would ask questions of the authorities and then explain to us why they were doing what they were doing. I will never forget her because she was the smallest person that I have ever seen in my life, but she had the biggest voice possible." Latrice seemed awestruck as she related how "this woman would walk around and even though she was not with the medical center, if she saw somebody that needed some help, she would give it to them."

Breathing a deep sigh of relief, Latrice finally was ushered on a bus with her father, who was delusional by this time. She didn't know whether he had become dehydrated or just shaken by standing so long. She was separated from her brothers whom she would meet later at the Dallas Convention Center. Asked about how she was feeling having been evacuated to Dallas, she replied, "I was angry, mad, sad, but kind of happy at the same time because New Orleans wasn't the ideal

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place to be even before the hurricane. There was a lot of corruption going on and something had to be done. If I was going to make it, I would have to put those feelings aside. And do what I have to do. Without an education, you can't do anything. I just can't let those emotions stop me from doing what I need to do."

Latrice recalled, as she gazed outside the safety of the bus, "looking back, there must have been double the people who were still waiting to get on the bus. And in my head, it looked like it never, ever moved!"

Imagine being an 18 year old, thrust out of a normal everyday existence, a sense of place, herded onto a bus, mostly strangers, and not really knowing where you are headed. Latrice said that she "got on the bus at 3:00 in the afternoon and didn't arrive until the next day. When we crossed over the border into Texas, they checked us again for weapons and any sharp objects. When we got to the Dallas Convention Center, I tried to compose myself and decide what to do next."

Trying to get her father to go to bed and sleep was her first priority. "I started to think about how to get in touch with my brothers and my aunt and uncle. Fortunately they, too, had made it to the Convention Center. Then we got on the Internet made available to us and managed to track my brothers down. They had been taken to Reunion Arena, but we knew then, that they were safe."

After being shuffled amongst the Convention Center, a church sanctuary, Reunion Arena, a hotel south of Dallas, another hotel in Farmer's Branch, a local minister found an apartment for them where they are currently staying.

During the time that Latrice was a sociology student in my class, I was struck by her sense of urgency about getting her story heard.

She desperately wanted people to know what had happened. To her dismay she would hear her fellow students say, "Why didn't we leave?" She explained to me that more than fifty percent of the people born in

New Orleans never live outside of the city. They live in extended and semi-extended families in the poorer districts. Parts of the city which are extremely vulnerable to hurricanes and flooding are home to most of them. These people can't just "up and leave" for higher ground. Their family is situated right there in the bowels of the city. Many don't even have personal transportation.

I asked her about what she thought sustained her throughout this bleak ordeal. "I prayed. I prayed a lot," she replied. You know this happened for a purpose... New Orleans needed to be rebuilt... there is no doubt about this... New Orleans needed to be rebuilt better and stronger... the levees were broke on purpose... if anyone looks at the breach you will see that it is broken, punched in... it didn't overflow. If it had overflowed, it would have been all of New Orleans that flooded. But they broke it there because they know that the houses down there are expendable. There is a rich area, nearby, called Eastover, where the stars live, and it didn't flood."

It would be easier to be in Dallas, according to Latrice, if she hadn't just started her freshman year in college. But Latrice's spirits brightened considerably by the end of the course. She announced proudly that she would be going back to Dillard College. "It's home. What can I say... it is home...I never say I am going back to New Orleans. I just say that I am going home."

Her father, on the other hand, plans to stay in Dallas and start a new life there.

During the final week, Latrice expressed to me how she had re-defined her future plans.

"Being in this sociology class really opened my eyes even more. I still want to do engineering and robotics, but I want to do construction in Africa now, after being part of this class. I want to design buildings in Africa...that would be so cool... it's important for one's career to be self-fulfilling... it would really make me feel that I have made a difference."

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I returned to college Spring '05, after a 22 year hiatus. When I attempted to reenter the workforce, I was told that without recent work experience or recent college enrollment—I had no job skills.

Previous college credit in Business Management, years of work experience, extensive volunteer activities, typing 60wpm, just didn't make me 'marketable.'

I enrolled at Collin County last spring looking for something different.

My reentry class was the Learning Community Criminal Justice and American History combo. My interest in Criminal Justice serendipitously led me to an internship with Collin County.

As the Intern for the Collin County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), a grant from the State, my job was to create public information pieces outlining the role of the Committee. Other assigned duties included working in the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

during a two day, multi-disaster drill coordinated by Homeland Security and the Strategic National Stockpile Bio-terrorism Exercise in Frisco. One of the many people

I was fortunate to meet on the LEPC was the Emergency Services Coordinator for the American Red Cross.

Hurricane Katrina: The First Night at Reunion

Donna Valentino

In June, I joined the **Red Cross** local **Disaster Action Team**. Local usually means house and apartment fires. I took as **many** classes as I **could** schedule to learn how to **work** a local event.

Monday, August 29th, I was fully activated:

I picked up the 'kit' containing the Red Cross's cell phone and waited. That afternoon my husband and I sat and watched events unfold in New Orleans in high-definition awe as by the minute, the situation deteriorated.

Wednesday, August 31st, I was in the McKinney Red Cross office watching evacuees stream into the building looking for assistance. Clearly, 'we' were not expecting nor prepared for what would follow. While still in the office, at 3pm I received a call from Dallas Red Cross on my personal cell phone—not their phone, asking that I come to Reunion Arena that night to work 11pm-7am; they were turning Reunion Arena into a shelter. My coordinator was stunned, as that was the first she heard. McKinney staffers were referring people as we spoke, to a shelter on Harry Hines in Dallas that was no longer open. It became quite apparent there were several evacuees in Collin County. Calls started coming in that hundreds were stranded in East Texas along the state line. The McKinney office received calls from evacuees in Tyler who ran out of gas on the Interstate.

I made it to Reunion Arena after my evening History class. Pulling into the parking lot, the first thing I noticed was the intense police presence. Once inside, signed in, I tried to get up to speed as soon as possible. The first thing I heard, was "be prepared, this could go on for 16 weeks; we could be here through Christmas."

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to the floor of Reunion
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wheelchair access.

That first evening was okay; the next morning—that's another story. We were set-up for 300 and had 225-240 by my estimate. There were several staying in their cars out in the parking lot; those who would not leave their pets or did not care for the 'openness' of the arena floor.

The first evacuees I met were two boys in their late teens, who after lights-out were still "not sleepy." They were funny and entertaining; one in particular caught everyone's eye with the gigantic, air-brushed, glow in the dark, marijuana leaf t-shirt; he was a big kid and it was a big shirt. He certainly had the attention of every officer on-site. I even helped them obtain special permission to step outside for a cigarette. The security guard, an outside officer, and I joked with them, "Okay, okay, if that's the only thing you're smoking." We spoke briefly about how bad things were in New Orleans and they sure didn't expect to end up here. One of the teens remarked "we really appreciate it; y'all didn't have to do this for us. I never been to Texas before, y'all are real nice." We thanked them in kind and told them it was our pleasure. I watched them take the massive stairs back down to the arena floor.

Next I assisted in checking a family that had just arrived from Houston. The dad, mother, an ill, elderly, wheel-chair bound grandmother, and their two teens arrived about midnight. I escorted them down to the floor of Reunion and showed them to a cluster of cots where they could remain together and grandma had easier wheelchair access. I ran back and forth for supplies, showed them the snack table, and pointed out the restrooms. I escorted them up and back several times; in our elevator rides, the dad told me they evacuated from the West Bank. It took them hours to make it to Beaumont; the hotel tripled their rate when they discovered they were from Louisiana. When they heard on the radio the Astrodome was open for evacuees, they headed there. Upon arrival at the Astrodome, they were told they could not shelter there until all the people in the Superdome had been moved to the Astrodome.

Their credit cards were maxing out and cash was running low. Grandma was not doing so well; as the dad put it, the stress was “messing with her diabetes.” The family ended up at Reunion because they heard over the car radio Reunion was a shelter. I asked him how long it took him to get to Dallas; he had driven 27 hours. As I shook my head and pondered their position, I had no idea that within a week’s time I would know that this family would be one of the luckier ones.

At around 1 a.m., I watched as a woman made her way through the upstairs entrance—a petite woman, about my age, carrying an obviously exhausted small boy; he was out cold. You could tell by his face he was young, but he was stout. The woman explained that she had just made it in from New Orleans; one of the other volunteers offered to take the sleeping boy from her arms while she filled out paperwork, but she politely refused. The volunteer filled out the forms for her, while mom repeatedly shifted the boy’s weight and repositioned his head, obviously worn out by the load she was bearing. Just before going downstairs, she looked at me and asked if I could see if her teenage son was in our shelter. The other volunteer pointed me to a box with loose sheets and binders from the other shelters that were moved to the arena (I didn’t know there were shelters opened the previous weekend). I looked for her teen’s name, while she told the small group of volunteers gathered how her 19 year old son had gone off with his best friend and his wife to check on her family after the hurricane. The mom had not seen him since; she couldn’t reach him by cell phone, but they intermittently text messaged each other. Last she heard, they were going to Houston or Dallas. I turned to her and told her I was sorry; we didn’t have his name listed. As we walked to the elevator, we discussed teenaged boys in general (I have one the same age myself). As we walked the halls of the backstage area of the arena, I jokingly pointed out that Mick Jagger and basketball greats walked down these same halls—it only got a little smile.

The family ended up at Reunion because they heard over the car radio Reunion was a shelter. I asked him how long it took him to get to Dallas; he had driven 27 hours.

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As I led her into the area of cots I thought best for her and her son, she decided to take a short-cut between two sleeping mounds, covered in blankets. Just as she was trying to tip-toe in, and still hang onto her son, I thought she completely tripped over a cot and fell. I turned back toward her, when a young man under the blankets popped up. I cannot describe the looks on both their faces as he reached up to catch her—she tripped over her son's best friend! As the best friend reached over and started shaking the son, she finally balanced on both feet, her eyes welled with tears, still clutching the sleeping boy. Unable to awake the son, the best friend began pounding him, shouting, "Dude! Dude! Your mom!"

I stood there not sure what I was watching; these were the same two guys goofing around with us upstairs earlier! The son finally raised up, looked at his mother, blinked twice, fell face down, and went back to sleep. The mom shook her head, spoke with the best friend briefly and quickly took the cot across the aisle at the foot of her older son's cot. I asked if she needed anything, she smiled and said, "No thanks;" she was just tired. I watched as the *still sleeping* 5 year old son was placed on the cot; mom curled up around him and pulled the blanket over both their heads. I turned and walked to the dock area, picking up towels, hygiene kits, snacks, and a juice pack. I left the items piled on the empty cot next to the sleeping mother and son. I walked past them several times throughout the early morning hours. They never moved.

The only way I can describe the next morning after breakfast is that I now have some idea what it was like at the fall of Saigon.

I worked in the EOC again when Governor Perry declared a State of Emergency enabling County Judge Ron Harris to declare the same in Collin County. I watched for two days the massive undertaking to open shelters; what I witnessed was amazing. It would be six weeks after Katrina before I worked at the Red Cross Service Center processing Katrina and Rita evacuees and distributing debit cards.

Potential

Kristina Valis

It's been a dismal winter.
Patiently, I've waited under heavy, dark clouds.
The ice and snow nearly suffocating my tender foliage,
And yet, I'm strong.

It's an unforgiving garden.
Persistently, I've failed growing past the fence.
My roots are firmly planted in rocky ground that is hard and cold,
And yet, I'm hopeful

It's a changing season.
Preemptively, I break free from my frigid prison.
The first warm rays of sun tease my stifled, restless spirit,
And yet, I'm encouraged

It's a new day
Passionately, I lift my face to the sky.
With fervor, I blossom and become more lovely and productive
And yet, I'm amazed



Sense by Paul Bellah



Your Unknown Possession

Christina Hickman

You, the American, the fortunate one
Wake each day to priceless opportunities
Gifts from some distant forefather
One who allegedly shed blood for you
You partake in these benefits daily
Without thought or even thanks
You attire yourself in hundred dollar skin
For which you will one day pay, but
Not now, thanks to Master Card
You transverse borders with no thought
Traveling from country to communism
To civil wars and back again
Simply relying on a blue, stamped book
You view fires, hurricanes, and starving children
From a Lazy Boy with beer in hand
Flipping screens if too boring or gory
Dismissing images with learned apathy
Christmas and Easter, ritualistic visits
To shell out dues to who knows what
God, merely a name seen when
Purchasing unneeded merchandise
Or maybe pondered on September 11
But only in fear or anger
You stroll from spouse to spouse
That is, if you decide to marry

Children and pets are good when lonely
But require no effort or instruction
Then you wonder about Columbine
You pour time, effort, and money
Into legalizing marijuana
And fail to connect overflowing jails
To the growing addictions
You idealize stick skinny supermodels
But send teenage girls into suicidal depression
Yes, you would be 100% American
Fortunate? Well, you should have been
But in your freedom you lost it
Enslaved to the incessant demands of self
Ask those living in oppression about it
They know the very essence of liberty
But you, you only know bondage
Slavery to the freedoms you think you so deserve

Painted Iron

by Nick Young



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